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# Involvement and Participation

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The notion of increasing levels of employee engagement in determining or at least influencing work activities and organisational decision-making is not a new idea. In their classic review of the literature, Glew et al. (1995) cite Hugo Munsterberg's *Psychology and Industrial Efficiency* (1913) and the Hawthorne studies from the mid-1930s (Mayo, 1933), while Kaufmann (2003) cites William Basset's *When the Workmen Help You Manage* (1919). Ivancevic (1979: 253–254) acknowledges the work of Argyris, Coch and French, Likert, McGregor and Mulder as later influences on the development of our understanding of 'employee involvement and participation' (hereafter 'EIP'). EIP is a longstanding and enduring issue.

EIP is also a multi-dimensional idea. There are a daunting number of issues to consider. These include the ongoing debate over what constitutes all of the possible manifestations of EIP (e.g. 'involvement', 'participation', 'voice' and 'empowerment'), what distinguishes them from each other and

how each should be operationalised. Cotton (1993), Dundon et al. (2004) and Wilkinson et al. (1997) have all addressed the definition debate.

The history of EIP in general terms is also worth considering, as is the history of particular techniques, and analyses of the contemporary context shaping EIP research. Abrahamson (1996, 1997) and Wilkinson (1998) have provided overviews of the history of the idea, while Bartunek and Spreitzer (2006) have accounted for the evolution of 'empowerment'. Strauss (2006) has examined the contemporary context.

Finally, perhaps the ultimate question – the effect of EIP schemes on organisational performance and employee well-being indicators – also demands attention. There have been several meta-analyses and reviews (see Handel and Levine, 2004; Locke and Schweiger, 1979; Miller and Monge, 1986; Wagner, 1994).

Rather less explored are the factors that distinguish effective schemes from

ineffective ones. Yet, as Magjuka and Baldwin (1991: 794) highlighted, there is a compelling need for 'empirical research which identifies the relevant design variables [for EIP schemes' effectiveness] and links such variables with programme outcomes'. Fenton-O'Creevy (1998: 68) noted: 'The most significant question to answer is no longer "what are the benefits of employee involvement?" Rather, it is "What makes the difference between effective employee involvement programmes and those that fail to achieve their objectives?"' This is our focus in this chapter. Rather than go over familiar ground on definition, context and outcomes we explore 'the conditions in which policies and practices are introduced [that] can influence outcomes', and 'the processes' of engagement among participants (Kessler and Purcell, 1996: 668). The practical benefits of this have been articulated by Zeitz et al. (1999: 742): 'Knowing the long-term prognosis of a practice can help in making decisions about allocating resources – instrumental and symbolic – to that practice. Practices that are destined to be entrenched may warrant more resources than transitory practices'.

The chapter proceeds as follows. We begin with a short summary of the definition debate over EIP before setting EIP within the wider strategic HRM agenda. Next, we expand upon Glew and colleagues' 1995 framework for understanding the factors impacting upon EIP schemes, to help us order the literature in a coherent fashion. In so doing, we advance the idea that EIP schemes can be studied according to life-cycle effects. Accordingly, the rest of the chapter covers the factors that determine the 'birth', early development, final design, longevity and the ultimate effectiveness of EIP schemes. Throughout we suggest several future research agendas.

## DEFINITIONS

The literature remains bedevilled by imprecise definitions of EIP even 30 years on from early attempts at synthesis (see Dachler and Wilbert, 1978; Locke and Schweiger, 1979).

**Table 15.1 Possible EIP schemes**

Attitude surveys	Quality circles
Continuous improvement groups	Suggestion schemes
European works councils	Self-managing teams
Job enrichment/re-design	T-groups
Joint management-staff committees	Teamworking
Joint working parties	Works councils
'Kaizen'	Team briefings

This is, in part, due to the myriad possible schemes that fall under the broad category of involvement/participation/empowerment (Sashkin, 1976) – see Table 15.1 – and to the 're-branding' of old schemes. Even today, scholars active in research into such schemes might disagree on basic definitions, and fail to recognise a given scheme as falling under the category assigned to it by another scholar,<sup>1</sup> because authors are imposing value judgements and/or using disciplinary conventions not shared by other schools of thought on EIP.

Seeking precise definitions, Vandervelde (1979, cited in Glew et al., 1995: 400) called for schemes to be defined precisely according to their 'who, what, where and how aspects' (see too Bowen and Lawler, 1992). Locke and Schweiger's (1979) widely cited definition presents 'participative decision making' as 'joint decision-making or influence sharing between hierarchical superiors and their subordinates'. Glew and colleagues (1995: 401) also see a hierarchical dimension (people working higher up the organisation bestowing 'opportunities' for input to their subordinates) as definitional to participation schemes. Tjosvold (1987: 739) similarly defines 'participation' as joint decision-making arrangements 'in which *employees are invited* to help solve organisational problems' (emphasis added). Such schemes '*give employees the legitimacy* to discuss organisational issues and problems and provide a setting for decision making' (Tjosvold, 1987: emphasis added). This hierarchical dimension is too restrictive for definitional purposes, however. Some schemes may not feature a hierarchical split and may comprise horizontal relationships instead, such as self-managing teams.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the Glew et al. agenda – confined solely to improving organisational performance – is too narrow. What is true, however, of all EIP schemes is that they seek to push influence, and even responsibility for, decisions down the organisational hierarchy (McMahan et al., 1998: 198).

Glew and colleagues' (1995) other criteria for EIP schemes are that they involve more than one person – participation is not an individual endeavour – in a manner that is visible to others. Further, EIP schemes are often seen as 'extra-role' or 'role-expanding' for those involved. But the crucial defining characteristic is the presence of a voice opportunity for participants, where voice refers to 'any vehicle through which an individual has increased impact on some element of the organisation ... without voice, there can be no enactment of participation' (Glew et al., 1995: 402; see also Kaufman, 2003: 178). This final distinguishing feature allows us to concentrate in this chapter only on those schemes that provide employees with a credible and active input into decision-making (Strauss, 2006: 779). Accordingly, we do not discuss information sharing devices such as newsletters, team briefings and attitude surveys, though these devices may indirectly provide bottom-up employee voice (Peccei et al., 2005).<sup>3</sup>

We also intend to isolate the EIP component from broader programmes such as 'high performance work systems' (cf. Huselid, 1995) as the content of such systems extends far beyond EIP. That said, in our review we reflect on Ledford's and Lawler argument (1994) that isolating EIP in this manner can lead to a de-contextualised and non-systemic analysis, and that this narrow focus may explain the modest impact of many EIP programmes.

In sum, our working definition of EIP is:

Employer-sanctioned schemes that extend to employee collectivities a 'voice' in organisational decision-making in a manner that allows employees to exercise significant influence over the processes and outcomes of decision making.

This definition incorporates both 'substantive' and 'consultative' forms of participation

(cf. Levine and Tyson, 1990), where the former equates to shared decision-making on the job, while the latter resembles a consultation exercise.

Such schemes can be categorised along a variety of dimensions (see Marchington et al., 1992; Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005), including:

- Purpose: why the scheme was initiated, to serve what and whose ends?
- Level: at what level of the organisational hierarchy does the scheme operate: team, workplace, divisional, strategic;
- Scope of the agenda: which subjects, and which decisions, are dealt with by the scheme (e.g. Hespe and Wall's (1976) three categories: 'local' [i.e. workplace and task concerns], 'medium' [i.e. workplace policies] and 'distant' [i.e. organisational strategy matters]; Connor (1992) identified nine different decision agendas;
- Direct or indirect: whether the scheme involves individual employees themselves [direct], or representatives of employees [indirect]
- Depth: the extent of employees' influence over the final decision, ranging from 'hardly any' through serving in an 'advisory' capacity to 'joint decision-making' up to full 'employee control'; alternative categories are 'suggestion involvement', 'job involvement' and 'high-involvement' in employers' strategy and policy (Bowen and Lawler, 1992); 'setting goals', 'decision-making', 'solving problems' and 'designing and implementing change' (Sashkin, 1976).

## EIP AND HRM

The necessity for some form of EIP appears in most HRM models, such as Pfeffer's (1998) set of seven universal 'best practices' used in better performing firms. Many authors draw upon human capital theory (Becker, 1964) arguing that harnessing employees' skills and knowledge can add economic value to the firm (see Riordan et al., 2005: 474). EIP schemes enhance decision-making by tapping employees' direct knowledge of possible solutions to organisational problems and their initiative (Hodson, 2001: 208), what Deming (1988) refers to as 'extracting the gold from the (employee) mine'. This links with the

claim from the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991) that employees' skills and knowledge are one source of unique sustainable competitive advantage.

EIP is a cornerstone of the 'AMO' model put forward by Appelbaum and colleagues (2000), in which the 'A' stands for enhancing employees' abilities, the 'M' for enhancing their motivation, and the 'O' stands for 'opportunities' for employees to participate, or utilise their abilities and motivation. EIP not only provides these opportunities but in so doing, arguably, increases employee motivation (Gollan et al., 2006: 500; Miller and Monge, 1986) and allows employees to use their abilities more than if no EIP opportunities existed. The theory is that this should increase performance levels.

Another performance-driven rationale for EIP is that employees' participation in them equates to additional, or discretionary, effort expended on behalf of the organisation 'beyond contract' (Fox, 1974). Higher levels of organisational citizenship behaviours [OCB] (Cappelli and Rogovsky, 1998) should improve firm performance (Glew et al., 1995; Spreitzer and Mishra, 1999; Wilkinson, 1998; 2008). Yet such behaviours are sometimes interpreted by unions and academic sceptics as work intensification (Ramsay et al., 2000), especially when participation is expected as an everyday work activity.

EIP schemes can also be used to encourage shared norms and organisational values (Sashkin, 1976). By inducing employee compliance with organisational goals, firms can anticipate extra discretionary effort, and also reduce costly monitoring of employee behaviour (Spreitzer and Mishra, 1999: 162). Yet several critics have equated this purpose with union substitution. EIP schemes may be seen as creating organisational commitment and reducing union commitment, with negative consequences for active union participation as employees' hearts and minds are won over to the organisation's agenda. Critics of EIP have further suggested that it can undermine union militancy, and preserves unfettered management prerogative (Parker and Slaughter, 1988). However, a

recent American study found that 'with each additional EIP experience union commitment *increases*', and that disaffection with ineffective EIP drives employees back toward their union (Hoell, 2004: 272 – emphasis added).

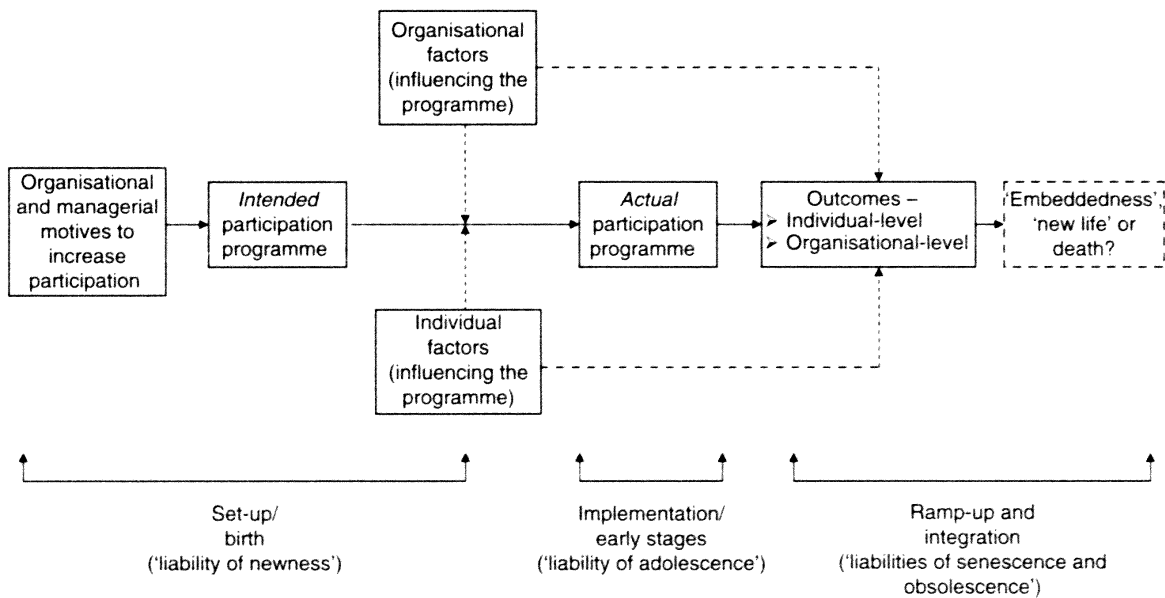
In empirical studies of the link between firm HRM practices and firm performance, EIP schemes feature prominently in operationalisations of HRM. In a sample of 104 empirical studies from 1995–2004, Boselie et al. (2005) found that 39 studies included measures of *direct* EIP, including seminal studies from Cooke (1994), Guthrie (2001), Huselid (1995) and MacDuffie (1995) while 11 studies included *indirect* forms, including key work from Batt et al. (2002), Delery and Doty (1996), and Ichiowski et al. (1997).

There is also a 'democratic humanism' (Wilkinson, 1998) or 'affective' (Miller and Monge, 1986), argument in favour of EIP. This views employee engagement in decisions as a good thing in and of itself, regardless of any effect on organisational performance metrics. Cappelli and Rogovsky (1998: 637) cite Adler's (1993) study in the celebrated NUMMI factory in Fremont, California, in which lean production methods ruthlessly constrain work tasks within narrow and de-skilled parameters, and yet NUMMI employees are able and even happy to 'put up with boring, 'unenriched' tasks because they have employee involvement'. In other words, managers may use EIP as a counter-weight to otherwise dispiriting aspects of daily work (see also Freeman and Kleiner, 2000).

In sum, EIP in whatever form is widely believed to improve firm performance and enhance employees' well-being. However, as we shall demonstrate, securing that added value is by no means a straightforward task.

### ***Establishing and running EIP schemes***

Glew and colleagues' (1995) holistic framework adapted for this chapter (see Figure 15.1) depicts each component of the process of establishing and running an EIP scheme. Their 'starting point' for any scheme is that managers see the potential to improve



**Figure 15.1** Glew and colleagues' (1995) framework of the participation process – adapted.

organisational performance – howsoever defined; managerial motives have ‘a direct effect on the programmes that organisations and managers intend to implement’ (Glew et al., 1995: 404). Thus, understanding these managerial motives as the catalyst for the scheme is a requirement of any research into such schemes.

Second, managers may design the EIP scheme in most cases (Glew et al., 1995: 397). However, case study evidence attests that the intended design and the actual scheme implemented rarely resemble each other (Kaufman, 2003; Labianca et al., 2000; Marchington et al., 1993; Wilkinson and Ackers 1995; Wilkinson et al. 1992). We discuss possible reasons for this mismatch.

Third, ‘an at-present unspecified set of *organisational* and *individual* factors may act as obstacles while other organisational and individual factors may serve as facilitators’ (Glew et al., 1995: 397; see also Sashkin, 1976). This corresponds to a contingency model of participation (Heller et al., 1998: 190–219). We discuss the most salient issues on these factors.

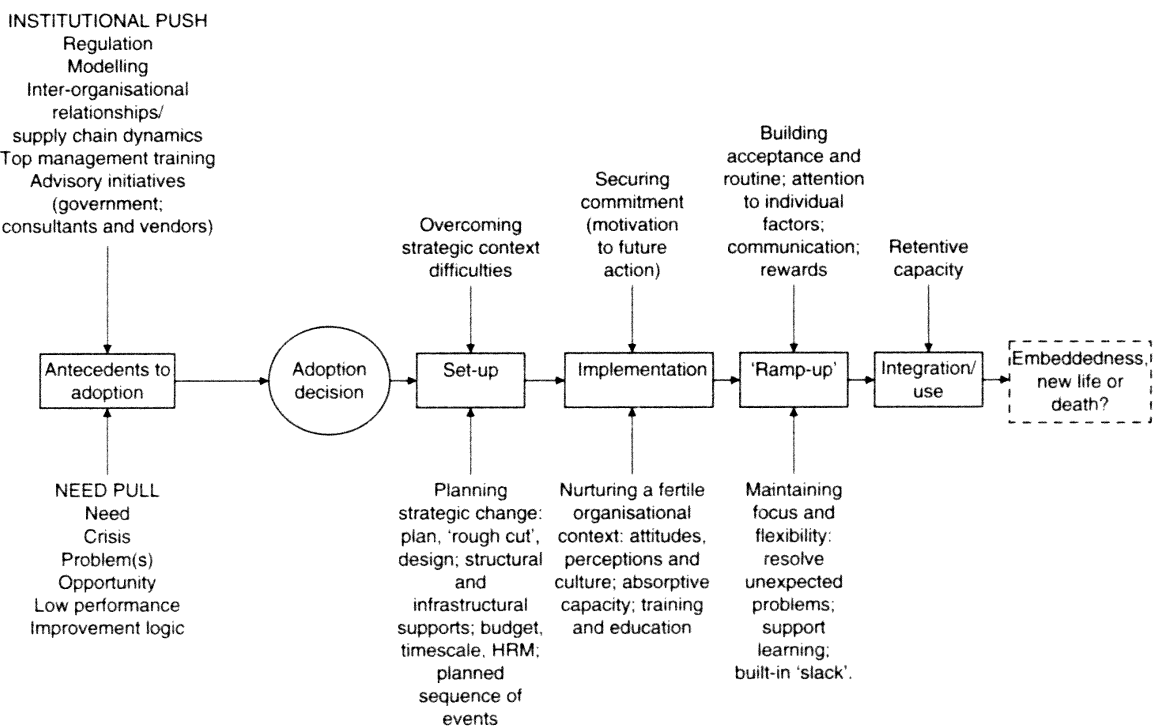
Finally, the scheme will have its outcomes, for the participants themselves, for the workplace and/or organisation as a whole, and for trade unions, where present. Here we

extend the ‘outcomes’ debate to consider the fate of the EIP scheme itself.

Glew et al.’s framework has the merit of including the influence of broader organisational and external contexts, and the impact that the history of setting the scheme up has on process and outcomes. Moreover, it does not restrict attention to the content of practices or to outcomes. Most importantly, it is sensitive to the perceptions and enthusiasm and capacities of managers involved in the design and implementation of the scheme, and employees on its receiving end.

A further theoretical framework which we can use to gather, order and analyse the literature on EIP comes from models of the adoption of work practices (Strauss, 2006). EIP schemes may be thought of as evolving over a typical ‘life-cycle’ of a new working practice. Lesure et al. (2004) synthesised a selected range of studies on the adoption of ‘best practice’ to produce a generic model (Figure 15.2).

As can be seen, a variety of issues determines the adoption decision, after which the scheme passes through four more ‘overlapping’ stages (cf. Tjosvold, 1987: 2, 32): set-up (‘the decision to proceed’), implementation (‘the mere launch of the programme’), ramp-up (the immediate usage



**Figure 15.2 Lesure et al. (2004): model for the adoption of innovative work practices – adapted.**

phase, during which problems are anticipated and addressed, and initial organisational learning begins), and integration (once the scheme has been routinised and embedded into organisational practice: ‘entrenched’, to use Zeitz et al.’s term (1999)). Each phase is shaped in part by a variety of factors as shown.

The overlaps between Lesure et al. and Glew et al. are readily apparent: ‘managerial motives’ equates to ‘adoption decision’, while ‘intended and actual participation programme’ equates to ‘set-up’ and ‘implementation’. However, the Lesure model extends the process to depict the scheme’s future prospects (the ‘integration’ stage), which have been hitherto neglected (Zeitz et al., 1999: 742). Recognising the often-truncated lifetime of these schemes (Kaufman, 2003: 188), we therefore extend both frameworks a stage further to include the ‘fate’ of the scheme: whether it becomes embedded, morphs into something else, or fails to survive and ‘dies off’.

Analogies with population ecology models of firm survival are helpful (Hannan and Freeman, 1984; Henderson, 1999; Stinchcombe, 1965). Borrowing from these

models, we see that at each stage of the scheme’s life-cycle, it may be threatened by a particular ‘liability’. At set-up, the ‘liability of newness’ militates against new schemes which are often rejected due to preferences for older, ‘more reliable’ EIP practices: ‘it is easier to continue existing routines than to create or borrow new ones’ (Henderson, 1999: 282). In this scenario, the scheme never gets initiated (Strauss, 2006: 783). The second liability, ‘the liability of adolescence’, afflicts the formative ‘birth pangs’ period of launch and implementation. An analogy here is of a ‘honeymoon period’ (cf. Heller, 1998) during which EIP schemes may survive for a short period on their initial assets (e.g. participants’ enthusiasm, organisational resources in terms of budget, senior management support and training), but should these run out schemes struggle without them. The third and fourth liabilities affect the mature phase of the scheme (i.e. beyond integration): the ‘liability of senescence’ materialises when schemes become inefficient, unproductive and unresponsive, and no longer fit for purpose, while the ‘liability of obsolescence’ means

that the scheme can be seen as no longer fit for purpose because it is outdated, and cannot be adapted to serve 'new organisational realities'. Support for an ageing process of EIP schemes has come from Kato (2006), while Strauss adopts a life-cycle model when he recounts the demise of the famous NUMMI and Saturn arrangements (2006: 784–787). The main questions are, therefore, why do schemes suffer from particular liabilities over the course of their life-cycle, and what factors can inoculate the scheme against these threats?

The following sections present the findings from selected EIP studies that have looked into each component of Glew and colleagues' framework, drawing for the most part upon work published since their 1995 article (for additional references and research evidence on each variable, readers are urged to consult the original article). We also locate studies within our 'life-cycle' model.

### THE 'BIRTH': MANAGERIAL MOTIVES AND RATIONALES FOR EIP

The Glew et al. framework posits a direct effect from managerial motives for having a scheme on the programme that they subsequently design and implement. Yet, surprisingly, they could find little research examining manager's thought-processes when setting up such schemes. Some 14 years on, this gap has not been filled.

For Lesure et al. (2004), there are powerful 'institutional pushes' (such as regulatory requirements and what is deemed professional 'best practice') and 'need pulls' (such as competitive pressures) that urge firms to adopt new practices, including EIP. These push and pull effects interact in complex ways, yet the authors note, 'many surveys confirm that institutional push mechanisms are often the sole driver for adoption' and with limited impact (Lesure et al., 2004: 48). Glew and colleagues also cite Kanter's (1983) claim that most managerial reasoning on EIP schemes is superficial, and 'faddish'.<sup>4</sup>

Second, an alternative thesis is that managers' awareness of, and concerns

regarding, a performance gap between what they would like and what they have creates a socio-psychological anxiety or cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) that can be alleviated by adopting the lauded management techniques of their day (such as variants of EIP) – provided that a discourse linking reasons for the performance gap with a ready-made solution has been disseminated, of course.

Third, most managers wish to be seen to be complying with prevailing norms of rationality and progressiveness, and they can do so efficiently by adopting lauded management techniques. Abrahamson and Fairchild (1999) looked specifically at the lifecycle of the fashion for one form of EIP, quality circles, in the US and confirmed a strong co-evolution between the discourse on quality circles and its diffusion.

Fourth, and related, managers follow 'high-fashion' organisations (Marchington et al., 1993). (One of the most important managerial motivators for the introduction of EIP is a desire by managers to be noticed internally and to engage in impression management through the creation of new schemes.) Equally, the strong influence of a 'star company' with well-developed EIP practices in a geographical region can result in considerable activity in the adoption of EIP in that locality.<sup>5</sup> Thus, adoption of EIP may have much to do with simple 'mimetic isomorphism' (cf. DiMaggio and Powell, 1990), or managers' self-interest, driven by macro-level 'management fashions'.

Strauss (2006: 787) argues that schemes 'are likely to be adopted only if they are perceived to have some sort of payoff in productivity, quality, turnover, satisfaction and the like – and they are dropped because they are perceived not to have such payoffs'. On this 'likely payoff' calculation, Bowen and Lawler (1992) see five purposes for empowering service staff: facilitating quicker responses to customer needs, particularly for dissatisfied customers (through spontaneous 'rule-bending'); employees feeling better about themselves and their jobs (work acquires more meaning and is more challenging); employees



interacting with ‘warmth and enthusiasm’ with customers (passing on managers’ concern for employees to customers); the solicitation of great ideas from employees as to improvements to the organisation and, finally, valuable word-of-mouth advertising and customer retention (from people telling their friends about exceptional service). Yet these alleged benefits are weighed against costs: a greater monetary investment in selection and training (to screen out likely poor performers); higher overall labour costs (from higher wages to retaining good, empowered staff), and potentially slower or inconsistent service delivery, violations of ‘fair play’, ‘giveaways’ and bad decisions (due to irregular acts of discretion by employees).

This suggests that managerial motivation for initiating an EIP scheme is a multi-dimensional and often internally contradictory variable. As we shall see in subsequent sections, competing explanations are examined in case study evidence from, among others, Kaufman (2003), Labianca et al. (2000), Timming (2007), Vallas (2003), and Wilkinson et al. (2004).

**ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS  
INFLUENCING THE EIP SCHEME’S  
DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Glew et al. (1995: 408) noted how several authors have argued for stronger effects from ‘situational variables than from individual [employee] differences’. EIP schemes in a given organisation appear to reflect its

particular external and internal circumstances, notably size, task complexity, strategy, work-force profile, and ‘participation climate’.

In Connor’s (1992) study of Oregon nursing homes, size and task complexity was associated with more use of employee participation schemes, but the results for profit-motive were limited. Addison et al. (1997: 443) found that size, age, and branch plant status [an ownership variable] were strong determinants of the presence of a works council in Germany (where it is mandated by law in firms with more than five employees) but, interestingly, works councils were less common where teamworking (i.e. direct EIP) was practised. This suggests that direct/indirect forms may act as substitutes in Germany. Miller and Monge (1986) found no significant effect from industrial sector on participation use.

With specific regard to service workers, Bowen and Lawler (1992) outlined ‘five contingencies that determine which approach to EIP to adopt’, which is arrived at by rating each contingency on a scale of 1–5 (see Table 15.2). Their ‘rule of thumb’-style propositions are that the higher organisations score their business on each contingency, the more appropriate ‘empowerment’ becomes, and the higher the cumulative score the more appropriate ‘empowerment’ becomes. Overall scores of 5–10 point to a production line approach, 11–15 to allowing staff to offer suggestions, 16–20 to providing staff with opportunities to re-design their jobs and work processes, while 21 and above suggests high-level systematic ‘empowerment’ at all organisational levels.

**Table 15.2 Bowen and Lawler: five contingencies for introducing ‘empowerment’ in service work.**

Contingency	‘Production line’ approach			‘Empowerment’ approach	
	1	2	3	4	5
Business strategy	Low-cost, high volume			Differentiation, customised, personalised	
Tie to the customer	Transactional, short-term			Relationship-building, long-term	
Technology	Routine, simple			Non-routine, complex	
Business environment	Predictable, few surprises			Unpredictable, many surprises	
Profile of workforce	‘Theory X’ managers, employees with low growth needs, low social needs and weak interpersonal skills			‘Theory Y’ managers, employees with high growth needs, high social needs and strong interpersonal skills	

Miller and Monge's (1986) meta-analysis reported that working in a strong participation-oriented climate had a strong positive effect on employee satisfaction. Yet, as Riordan et al. (2005) concede, the planned creation of a climate is formidably difficult. In their study of EI climate's effect on organisational performance, they measured EI climate along four dimensions: *power* (employees have sufficient influence over the final decision), *information* (parties have sufficient information to make effective decisions), *training* (parties are trained in the skills and knowledge necessary to make the scheme work), and *reward* (any performance benefits for the organisation will be shared with participants). They theorised that firms with a stronger EI climate (i.e. high levels of all four attributes) would report higher corporate financial performance and lower employee turnover, and that greater employee morale – through higher employee commitment and job satisfaction – would fully mediate this relationship. Their multi-level study of employees in 92 North American insurance companies confirmed positive effects for EI climate on financial performance and turnover, but only commitment served as a mediator. In a separate study, Vandenberg et al. (1999, cited in Riordan et al., 2005: 484) found that other practices supportive of an EI climate included having a clear vision and direction, incentives linked to EIP behaviours, the promotion of flexible work practices and semi-autonomous job designs, and significant resources dedicated to continuous learning. Bowen and Lawler (1992), in discussing 'empowerment' argued that four 'organizational ingredients' must be shared with frontline employees in order for such schemes to work: *Power* to make decisions that influence organisational [or workplace] direction and performance; *Information* about the organisation and its current circumstances and future intentions; *Rewards* based on the organisation's performance; *Knowledge* that enables employees to understand the 'information' given to them. In three British public health organisations Bach (2004) found

that the overwhelming 'performance targets' climate militated against the effectiveness of both direct and indirect forms of employee voice – despite staff enthusiasm for a greater voice.<sup>6</sup>

All of this suggests that EI climate would be a potentially very interesting line of research for EIP. There is a need to understand the antecedents and consequences of EI climate in more depth. Climate research in organisational behaviour in general is developing rapidly (Hoffman et al., 2003; Lindell and Brandt, 2000; Schneider et al., 2002), and further EI climate studies would be a valuable contribution to a fuller understanding of climate research.

A related variable to 'climate' is the degree of embeddedness, or entrenchment, of EIP schemes in the internal running of the organisation: an effective 'participation climate' is only achievable with embedded schemes. Lawler et al. (1995) argued that wide internal diffusion of EIP determines the success of the programmes (see also Zeitz et al., 1999). For Cox et al. (2006: 252), 'the degree of embeddedness reflects the centrality of EIP to the workplace and will thus affect the strength of its impact'. The latter group of researchers conceptualise embeddedness along two dimensions: *breadth* (how many EIP schemes operate in the workplace), and *depth* (the scope and relevance of the agenda, and the regularity of the meetings). Using nationally representative UK data, Cox et al. found that additive combinations of practices on both dimensions showed consistently positive associations with employee organisational commitment and job satisfaction. Thus, employees' attitudes to EIP are dependent, *inter alia*, upon the prior experiences of EIP and work in general, management approaches to employee relations, and the recent and projected organisation's performance.)

Another form of embeddedness is the degree to which EIP schemes suffuse internal social networks within the organisation. Rubinstein and Kochan's (2001) study of the Saturn plant showed that cross-functional social networks contribute to the initial success of EIP. One conclusion from Labianca

et al.'s (2000) study of an 'empowerment' programme inside a healthcare company is that both managers' and employees' 'schemas' must align on the programme must align in order for the programme to be taken seriously. They found that this alignment can be 'massive and sudden, given sufficient disconfirmation' (Labianca et al., 2000: 252) of the old schema 'through enacted behaviour by management and employees' (Labianca et al., 2000: 253; emphasis in the original), including the open airing of grievances about the old ways of doing things. Interestingly, they suggest that managers' defensive efforts to override employees' initial scepticism or resistance may only 'reinforce the old schema that employee concerns are insignificant compared to management's' (Labianca et al., 2000), echoing Tjosvold's (1987) support for 'productive controversy'. In sum, embeddedness is only realised when managers and employees come to interpret the EIP scheme *similarly*. Managers may have to take a few hits before this can happen.

Missing from the Glew et al. framework is the influence of national culture. In common with much of the management literature, most published EIP studies have been conducted in North American work settings (see Poutsma and Huijgen, 1999, for a European review). The influence of national culture norms has been explored in several studies, and the evidence casts doubt on the universal applicability of schemes extending to employees' influence over their work. For example, McFarlin et al. (1992) reported hostility among British, Dutch and Spanish managers to their American multi-national parent's attempt to 'export' an American variant of EIP. Welsh et al.'s (1993) study inside a textiles factory in Russia found that a US-made participation programme clashed with Russian norms of solidarity and support for one's leader [which the scheme potentially undermined]. Additionally, the workers had been 'frustrated by a façade of participation' in the past, and so withheld suggestions on improvements and seemed to deliberately reduce their performance levels in order to avoid engagement with

EIP (Welsh et al., 1993: 73–74). While Welsh and colleagues infer that this may be a national cultural phenomenon, similar attitudes and behaviours have also been observed in Western settings (Cox et al., 2006). All this suggests that disentangling national cultural effects from organisational context could be a useful direction for further research.

## INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEE FACTORS INFLUENCING EIP SCHEME DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Cappelli and Rogovsky (1998: 635) note how, for most studies, the mechanisms through which programmes are believed to contribute to improved work performance 'turn mainly on relationships with psychological needs'. Lam et al. (2002) argue that 'researchers should look beyond situational and methodological moderators and examine psychological pre-dispositions' to learn more about the factors likely to influence EIP schemes' effectiveness. Thus, the *pre-dispositions* and *self-interests* of those involved – supervisors, managers, workers – are pertinent. We take each constituency in turn.

### *Managers' and supervisors' dispositions, motivators and needs*

One of the most widely observed factors hampering EIP is management scepticism or even outright hostility. Managers may not always implement the scheme in the manner intended. Soliciting employees' input into organisational activities that were previously the exclusive domain of supervisors and/or managers shifts the balance of power in the standard employee-manager relationship, however modestly (Batt: 2004; Klein, 1984: 95). Managers and supervisors can perceive this as an unacceptable encroachment on their 'prerogative' (Glew et al., 1995: 410; see also Purcell, 1991). Many managers see re-distribution of influence as a 'zero-sum game': 'It can only diminish their own [control

and influence]' (Fenton O'Creevy, 1998: 71). Similarly, Wilkinson noted

... the removal of expert power [with the introduction of an EIP scheme designed to share decision-making responsibility] is often perceived as a significant threat and participative management is seen as a burden to many middle managers, and it is not surprising they do not universally welcome it (1999: 52)

Aside from the loss of status and perceived assault on managerial prerogative and hence on their self-identity, Spreitzer and Mishra (1999: 156) put a different emphasis on the risks involved for managers:

The very act of involving lower echelon employees requires some risk on the part of managers who make themselves vulnerable by ceding authority to lower echelon employees, authority that was previously restricted to the manager ... a fundamental problem facing managers is how they can give up control through the involvement of employees in decision making without losing control.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, studying the perspective of those most likely to be charged with the design and implementation of the schemes is critical to understanding what determines effectiveness.

The theme of resistance is 'remarkably constant' in the literature (Fenton-O'Creevy, 1998: 69). He described several kinds of middle manager resistance behaviours:

- 1 rubbishing the scheme;
- 2 expressing only mild or forced enthusiasm for the scheme – the signal received by employees being equivalent to the first tactic;
- 3 controlling access to the scheme, whether to favourites (as a reward) or miscreants (as a punishment); using the scheme to confer favours or exert discipline;
- 4 coercing participants into taking part, and producing the outcomes sought by the manager – regardless of the EIP scheme's remit.

In his study of 155 UK organisations, Fenton-O'Creevy found lack of senior management support to be the strongest contributor to middle management resistance, as well as the absence of any incentives

for managers to comply. A 'trickle-down' effect appears to be in operation here with middle managers managing their direct reports in the way they themselves are managed. A perceived threat to job security or promotion opportunities was also influential. The practical implication is that middle management resistance is, unsurprisingly, linked to lower reported benefits from the scheme for the organisation. Thus, if an organisation accepts the rationale behind EIP and anticipates the performance benefits, then planned steps to overcome managerial scepticism is an organisational imperative. Yet Fenton-O'Creevy argued that middle management resistance 'may be a symptom of a wider failure to set up employee involvement initiatives properly' (1998: 80): the variance in middle management resistance and scheme effectiveness may be explained by organisation-level variables, such as reward systems, EI climate and senior management support.

Klein (1984) summarised her research into front-line supervisors' engagement with EIP schemes in eight US manufacturing plants of four multi-nationals. She noted the common refrain of 'what's in it for us?' Supervisors' main concerns were threefold: threat to job security, threat to their established job definition, and the perceived extra burden of time and effort associated with implementing EIP schemes. From her observational study, Klein identified five types of resistant front-line supervisors.

- 1 'Theory Xers': Managers who are used to, and prefer, command and control styles of management for whom EIP is anathema.
- 2 'Status seekers': Managers who wish to retain their power and internal status for whom EIP seems to undermines their self-identity.
- 3 'Sceptics': Managers with no fundamental objections but considerable doubts as to whether the scheme will work, or endure.
- 4 'Equality seekers': Managers who want EIP for them too.
- 5 'Deal makers': Managers who have come to rely upon their informal deal-making powers in order to manage, for whom the rules and processes of EIP are a threat.

For Klein (1984), training programmes in running EIP tend to be ineffective. More successful interventions to persuade front-line supervisors to relent and support EIP are: showing it to them in action, giving them their own input into higher-level decision-making (including on the design of the EIP scheme itself), and support networks.

By contrast, Vallas' (2003: 244) study of teamwork and continuous improvement programmes inside four paper mills in the U.S found that middle managers might *embrace* EIP as a means of '*expanding* their authority in ways that they had not previously enjoyed' (emphasis in the original), principally by making EIP participants under their charge feel like 'a band apart' from the rest of the workforce in a manner that bolsters managers' own authority (2003: 237). Vallas concluded, 'the outcome of workplace change [i.e. EIP] initiatives tends to reflect the distribution of control over the implementation of the process itself' (p. 245).

Batt's (2004) research inside a large U.S corporation illustrates what she calls the 'political' dimension of EIP schemes (in her case, self-managed and off-line teams). She looked at the effect of involvement in teams for workers, supervisors and managers on three dependent variables – job satisfaction, discretion, and job security – and found that 'organizational position is significantly related to work-related attitudes [regarding the team programmes] but not in entirely predictable ways' (2004: 205). Batt expected that workers would enjoy the extra discretion and hence report higher levels of satisfaction (though this effect would be much weaker for the much less influential off-line team format); supervisors would be more sanguine and even fearful over possible losses to their discretion and job security, and middle managers would gain if they were rewarded personally for any organisational performance improvements secured, but they might suffer if the team structure led to stressful conflicts among workers and supervisors. Overall, she found minimal impacts on any of the outcomes from off-line teams, reinforcing a recurrent finding

in the literature: cosmetic schemes that do not disturb existing power dynamics in organisational decision-making tend not to be effective for anyone. On self-managed teams, Batt concluded,

Workers benefited significantly [from more discretion, which primarily mediated their job satisfaction], supervisors lost out [largely from a loss of job security], and middle managers who initiated self-managed teams had higher levels of employment security than their more traditional counterparts [though, overall, the positive outcomes for middle managers were rather modest in magnitude] (p. 200).

Finally, Spreitzer and Mishra explored the impact of managers' trust in their employees (across four factors: employees' reliability, openness, concern and competence) on managers' willingness to allow employees to engage in participation schemes, and the impact of the schemes on three measures of organisational performance (mediated by managers' willingness to support them). They further compared trust against managers' other options for coping with their vulnerability in participation schemes, incentivising employees' cooperation and giving employees' performance feedback. In a survey of 43 firms in the American automotive industry, all three control mechanisms had significant effects on managerial engagement with EIP. In concluding, the authors argued, '... trust, performance information and incentives must be employed in tandem with a willingness of managers to involve lower echelon employees in decision-making to achieve desired performance effects' (Spreitzer and Mishra, 1999: 176).

### ***Employee dispositions, capacities, motivations and needs***

Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow (2003: 321) note that 'the consistent emphasis on the role of top management as the key driver for change downplays the role of individual differences' when it comes to whether *employees* adopt a favourable orientation toward EIP schemes. Riordan et al. (2005: 472) echo this point

by noting how EIP programmes 'will be meaningless unless employees behave in ways that are supportive of EI'. Thus, while understanding the perspective of the instigators and co-ordinators of EIP schemes is crucial, so too is awareness of the factors that shape the level of engagement of the recipients and enactors of such schemes – the employees themselves. Hespe and Wall (1976) cited Walker (1972: 1183) thus: 'If there is little interest and pressure for workers' participation among workers, little difference is made by their having high capacities and high relative power, or by a high acceptance of workers' participation on the part of management'.

Neumann (1989, cited in Glew et al., 1995) proposed three categories of explanations as to why individuals might choose not to engage in EIP schemes. Each reflects disposition and motivation in different ways.

- 1 Structural: the awareness that the real decisions are made outside the EIP scheme, so why bother?
- 2 Relational: whether the organisation's hierarchical arrangements 'promote competition and emphasize rank and status over mastery and competence' (Glew et al., 1995: 410).
- 3 Societal: the effects of employee socialisation, ideology or history of labour-management relations.

In a similar fashion, Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow (2003: 321) invoke the model of 'person-environment fit' (p. 322), in which 'desirable outcomes are optimised when employee (i.e. person) desires, values and abilities are congruent with job (i.e. environment) characteristics'.

Allen et al. (1997: 118) reasoned that participation rates in such schemes 'depend on employee *self-selection*', and so understanding this process of deliberation – whether to get involved or not – is critical to understanding what might make schemes work or collapse (p. 119). They applied expectancy theory to the issue: taking part is subject to assessments of whether this is feasible, whether the scheme is likely to succeed, and whether the benefits accrued by the employee

are attractive enough. Specifically, willing volunteers will see in well-designed EIP schemes opportunities for personal growth and personal achievement. Additionally, they theorised that powerful social norms in the workplace would also determine employees' self-selection decisions: people surrounded by family and friends who are also positive about the scheme will be more likely to volunteer.

This line of work is suggestive of the value of applying Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action to examine employees' participation in EIP. This approach views attitudes and subjective norms as predicting behavioural intentions, which in turn predict actual behaviour. Subjective norms reflect the extent to which significant others, such as family, friends and co-workers, express support for EIP. In line with the general theoretical approach in reasoned action studies, subjective norms are measured as the product of the perceived normative beliefs of others and the individual's motivation to comply with such beliefs (Kelloway and Barling, 1993). The theory of reasoned action assumes that the behaviour in question is volitional, so that behavioural intention provides a sufficient explanation of actual behaviour. In fact, many types of EIP behaviour are not necessarily under employees' volitional control, but are also affected by such factors as personal skills and capacities, and the availability of sufficient time or opportunity – as we discussed above. This is explicitly recognised in Ajzen's revision to the theory of reasoned action, known as the 'theory of planned behaviour' (Ajzen, 1991). This includes an additional predictor of behavioural intentions and of actual behaviour: 'perceived behavioural control'. Ajzen defines this as the degree to which an individual's ability to perform the behaviour in question is perceived by the individual to be volitional. There has yet to be any published study we can find in which the theory of planned behaviour has been applied to decisions concerning engagement with EIP. This could be a fruitful line of future work.

Allen and colleagues' (1997) study inside a large electric utility company with a

programme of weekly team-based problem solving meetings confirmed that people with an 'internal' locus of control and high growth needs will be more favourably disposed to getting involved in EIP voluntarily, and such people might constitute a 'target group' for schemes to be aimed at. Their study endorses a contingent approach derived from expectancy theory. The obvious practical implication is that, given these 'dynamics', 'not all employees will be interested in participating' (p. 137) and 'volunteers and non-volunteers are different before they get involved in the EI process' (p. 138). They offer a salutary note of caution against the universal use of such interventions: 'It is probably unreasonable to expect profound changes in organisational performance and culture given the limited number of individuals likely to be interested in participation over time' (Allen et al., 1997: 138).

From our review of the literature, it is surprising that we have been unable to locate any study examining the relationship between the so-called 'Big Five' personality dimensions and employee participation in EIP. Given literally hundreds of studies of the relationship between the big five personality dimensions and behaviour at work (see Barrick and Mount, 1991), this is an important omission in the EIP literature.

Lam et al. (2002) looked at the moderating effects of another individual disposition on perceived participation in decision-making and employee performance: employees' allocentrism (a predominately collectivist orientation in individuals) or idiocentrism (a fundamentally individualistic orientation). They also looked into employees' perceptions of their self- and group-efficacy as a further moderator, and at the interaction effects between these variables. They hypothesised that group members with highly allocentric beliefs would appreciate EIP opportunities but *only if* they also have confidence in the groups' efficacy, while highly idiocentric employees would only welcome EIP schemes if their self-efficacy beliefs were also high. Employees possessing these complementary combinations of beliefs would be expected to

perform better in the schemes. Studies in Hong Kong and the US confirmed that the variables did interact in the manner hypothesised. The authors concluded: 'Participative decision-making interventions will be more successful to the extent that programme developers match them to the values of target recipients and train them in ways that increase their most relevant efficacy cognitions' (Lam et al., 2002: 913).

Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow (2003) reported mixed results from their study of 'TQM orientation', operationalised by scales on teamwork and continuous improvement. They found that individual-level employee factors (such as trust in one's colleagues and continuous improvement behaviours) explained unique variance in teamwork, active involvement in work, allegiance to quality and personal accountability over and above that accounted for by demographic and organisation-level factors (such as top management support). These individual factors 'are better predictors of TQM orientation' (p. 334). They conclude: 'The inherent drive to reduce system variability [in TQM] places an undue emphasis on getting the system right, and in doing so, neglects the potentially significant impact of individual dispositions and the interactions between these individual characteristics and the system within which individuals work' (Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow, 2003: 335). It is to the system of EIP that we now turn.

## THE ACTUAL PARTICIPATION PROGRAMME

'In reality, of course, it is the actual participation programme, rather than the intended one, that results in whatever outcomes are realised' (Glew et al., 1995: 399). Sashkin (1976: 80) noted how, even after the careful contingent design of a scheme, 'there remains the issue of changing to that approach from whatever currently exists'. In this section we discuss how EIP schemes come about, and the forms taken, with a particular emphasis on research into the impact of interpersonal dynamics



and changing mind-sets and orientations, or 'schemas' (Bartunek, 1984).

### **Group composition and resources**

Magjuka and Baldwin (1991) found that, of seven design variables identified by managers as potentially affecting EIP schemes' effectiveness, three – team heterogeneity, team size and information access – accounted for half the variance in participant and supervisor ratings of teamworking schemes' effectiveness. Of these three, information access proved the most decisive. The authors note how this finding counters some widely shared beliefs, especially among managers, that 'there may be a *disutility* to ensuring an open access structure for EIP teams' (p. 807), arising from the substantial extra costs incurred in providing this extent of information. EIP thrives upon information-sharing and struggles in its absence.

### **Problem or decision type**

As Tjosvold (1987: 745) noted, 'people working together are superior to individuals [e.g., managers] working alone, especially for complex tasks. The flipside of this is that participation may be counterproductive for relatively straightforward organisational decisions' (Tjosvold, 1987). Yet this contradicts a common assumption in the literature that lower-level employees, unfamiliar with the opportunity to influence organisational decision-making, will value it more highly than their organisational superiors for whom such input is expected.

Cappelli and Rogovsky (1998) looked at employee involvement schemes inside eight US public utilities to explore the effects on employees' organisational citizenship behaviours, and whether this is mediated through perceptions of the five dimensions of job enrichment ('variety of tasks', 'perceived job significance', 'degree of employee autonomy', 'feedback from the organisation' and 'identity with the organisation'). They compared results for two decision types: a) organisation of work tasks, and

b) employment practices. They hypothesised that the former would be significant for OCB and would lead to positive assessments of all five job enrichment characteristics, but that the latter would have less of an impact on OCB and would only operate through positive effects on 'variety of tasks' and 'perceived job significance'. Importantly, their measure captured employees' perceived *actual influence* over these decisions, rather than whether they thought they had the *opportunity* to do so. The results confirmed their hypotheses, though they also found important *direct* effects of involvement in work organisation decisions that did not operate through the five job enrichment mechanisms (1998: 645). In sum, 'involvement *per se* improves OCB' (p. 647), but this effect is particularly pronounced for decisions relating to work organisation (i.e. to local workplace and immediate task concerns) – echoing earlier studies by Hespe and Wall (1976) and Wall and Lischeron (1977).

Taken together, the findings seem to recommend that EIP initiatives targeted at localised problem-solving will be met with more employee enthusiasm than more distal decisions, as the former decisions fall within employees' capacity to offer *meaningful* input.

### **Interpersonal dynamics and mind-sets**

As well as requiring some degree of enthusiasm for EIP in the first place, the quality of the interpersonal dynamics between the managerial participants and their staff counterparts directly affects the experience of both parties and the outcomes of the participation. It can be seen as the 'crucible' within which EIP schemes thrive or fail. Vallas comments thus:

... workplace change [i.e. introducing EIP] is not akin to a surgical procedure performed under anaesthesia. Rather, it constitutes a negotiated phenomenon in which the language, rhetoric, and strategies that particular occupational groups employ can either blur or heighten the boundaries that exist within the firm (2003: 227).



Lesure and colleagues found from their review of studies into the adoption of new work practices that, 'The importance of employee commitment at [the implementation] stage receives very mixed support, not to say no support. However, research suggests that training and educating the employees about the new practices is much more important than trying to secure their commitment at this stage' (Lesure et al., 2004: 75).

Tjosvold (1987) has proffered some thoughts on interpersonal dynamics. His model cites 'cooperative goals' (a common purpose and sense of genuine rather than facile interdependence) as one obvious influential factor determining these interactions, yet his other factor, 'productive controversy' (i.e. pitching opposing views against each other *deliberately*) is more counter-intuitive, given that one of the unspoken objectives of participation schemes is often a sense of cohesiveness and unity of purpose among employees and managers. In support of the merits of his controversy dynamic, Tjosvold cites the dangers of groupthink and the avoidance of discussing opposing information as dynamics that stifle effective problem solving. Productive controversy helps participants to subject their own position to doubt, inspires curiosity and the desire to understand the alternative standpoint. These processes, Tjosvold claims, have been found to aid decision-making. Productive controversy is facilitated by the presence of cooperative goals, as participants feel able to disagree in pursuit of a commonly acceptable and valued outcome; a climate of respect in which challenges to others' views do not undermine perceived competence, and the practice of constructive discussion wherein parties seek to influence rather than dominate other participants.

Labianca et al. (2000) conducted an in-depth case study over two years of an 'empowerment' programme in a health care organisation, from which they produced an iterative model of 'schema change': in other words, participants' evolving interpretations of, and hence support for, the scheme. Their findings suggest that, 'change recipients' failure to revise old decision-making

schemas and to enact new schemas during a pivotal period in the empowerment effort created resistance to change' (Labianca et al., 2000: 236). Their four stages of schema change are:

- 1 Motivation to change;
- 2 'New schema generation' – when managers' perceptions and employees' perceptions and aspirations may clash;
- 3 'Iterative schema comparison' – when the newly emerging schema is compared to the old way of doing things, and tangible, enduring shifts in approach are either confirmed or refuted by parties' actions and outcomes, and
- 4 'Stabilisation' – depending on stages 2 and 3, either the old schema remains or it is replaced by the new schema.

The authors found that, during the pivotal stage 3, 'employees evaluated all of management's ongoing actions as to whether the actions were more consistent with the original decision-making schema or with their expected new participation schema' (Labianca et al., 2000: 250). They note that employees' resistance to such schemes 'may stem as much from difficulties in revising the well-established, ingrained decision-making schema [in place prior to the EIP scheme] as from intentional self-interested behaviour' (p. 236). They further observe, 'Until the actions of managers and employees consistently match the new schema, employees are likely to be sceptical of the empowerment effort' (p. 251; see also Rosenthal et al, 1997).

Timming's study (2007) of a British multi-national's European works council also illustrates the importance of interpersonal dynamics: in this case, as a negative influence tactic used by management. Timming found evidence of managers' 'proactive fragmentation' of the employee representatives through the 'reification of competitive tendencies between workers' and the creation of 'privileged groupings' (pp. 257–258). Managers in one company used a deliberate 'divide-and-rule-via-the-privileging-of-one-group-over-another' approach (p. 257) which, unsurprisingly, intensified a lack of collaboration among the different workforces.

but failed to improve workforce-management relations. Timming suggests that this may be based less upon a 'calculative strategy for enhancing organisational performance, but rather on a historico-cultural attitude' within UK industry of antipathy toward EIP.

## OUTCOMES

Previous reviews and meta-analyses of the impact of participation on performance outcomes have reported 'mixed' (Cappelli and Rogovsky, 1998) and somewhat 'equivocal' results (Lam et al., 2002), with even the most positive effects being rather modest (Wagner, 1994). Locke and Schweiger's (1979) original review can be summarised as finding positive effects on job satisfaction but, generally, less of an impact on actual performance levels. The authors did not offer too many firm conclusions, due to what they saw as the likely influence of so many other hidden or latent variables, principally around employees' knowledge and motivation, and various task, group and leadership attributes at the organisational level.

For their meta-analysis of 47 EIP studies, Miller and Monge (1986) looked at participation schemes' effect on productivity and employees' job satisfaction. They presented three theoretical rationales for the anticipated positive effect. The first was the *cognitive* model: EIP schemes enhance information flow, which leads to better decisions and employees' understanding of the final decisions, while increases in satisfaction are derived from employees' observation of tangible positive results and from pride in their specific inputs. The second model was *affective*: EIP schemes satisfy employees' higher-order needs of self-expression, growth and independence, and they contribute to improved productivity through an initial mediating phase characterised by enhanced motivation which, in turn, produces greater satisfaction. It is the *act* of participation that works, not necessarily the outcome. Finally, their *contingent* model sees EIP schemes as subject to moderating variables such as participants' personality, the decision situations,

superior-subordinate relations, job level and organisational values/climate. This latter model challenges the dominant assumption in the affective model that the need for participation is universal. Across the 47 studies, Miller and Monge found no support for various contingency-derived predictions, including for job level or sector (though they could not test personality differences). There was stronger support for participation's effect on satisfaction than on productivity. There was stronger support overall for the cognitive model ('moderately strong') over the affective alternative ('low, but significant'), suggesting that EIP schemes might work best when employees are deploying specific knowledge to problems pertinent to their own work – again, echoing previously cited studies on employees' parochial interest in EIP. Miller and Monge concluded that the cognitive model might better explain observed effects on productivity, while the affective model might better explain effects on satisfaction.

Wagner (1994) reported from his meta-analysis that the overall effect of participative decision-making on job performance was positive but small, especially after omitting single source studies (i.e. the same respondent for both independent and dependent variables).

In another meta-analysis, Doucouliagos (1995) looked at anticipated effects from various EIP schemes, including forms of joint decision-making/influence sharing on organisational commitment, efficiency, productivity, work effort and 'free rider' problems (all presumed to be positive), and managerial power and managerial decision-making (presumed to be negative). He further compared findings from 'labour-managed firms' (i.e. worker cooperatives) with 'participatory capitalist firms'. Overall, the average correlations proved to be small. An interesting finding was that profit-sharing performed worse than participative decision-making in participatory capitalist firms.

Freeman and Kleiner (2000) also report barely any effect on productivity from eight different forms of EIP, but they did find substantial improvements to employee

well-being, including 'looking forward to going to work' and employees' trust in their company. They conclude with a rare appeal to the 'welfare capitalism'/'affective' rationale for EIP: 'Since EI[P] has no adverse effects or a slight positive effect on the bottom line, firms will offer it to please their workers' (p. 22).

Handel and Levine's (2004) review of studies conducted in the US looked in-depth into the link between EIP schemes and wage levels, as well as other employee outcomes. Overall, their summary position is that EIP 'can improve organisational outcomes *if the reforms are serious*' (2004: 38 – emphasis added), but the evidence on workers' welfare, including pay, is 'mixed' and most positive effects are modest. They conclude:

While these findings do not support the most positive views of EI as a 'high-road' solution to the problems of poor wage growth and increased inequality, they do not indicate that management by stress is typical, nor do they suggest that skill-biased organisational change is a significant cause of inequality growth (pp. 39–40).

Charlwood and Terry (2007) analysed nationally representative data on workplace practices in the UK, and found that unionised forms of representative engagement were associated with reduced wage dispersion (their 'equity' outcome), but also with reduced productivity (their 'efficiency' outcome); non-union forums had no effect on either outcome. Intriguingly, the authors reported that 'dual-channel representation [i.e. unionised and non-unionised forums, together] would appear to offer employees the benefits of union representation (flatter wage structures) without the possible employer disadvantages (lower productivity)'. (ibid. 334–335) However, they cautioned against drawing causal inferences.

That an HR policy often hailed as a panacea for all organisational deficiencies and tribulations (see Peters and Waterman, 1982; Pfeffer, 1998) should suffer such disappointing findings might have been expected to dampen advocates' enthusiasm. But this has not been the case, and EIP continues to resurface as a

potential solution to organisations' enduring performance and morale challenges.

One reason for EIP's modest impact may be that identified by Ledford and Lawler (1994): it may be that many researchers define EIP so narrowly that 'it cannot have a major impact on organisational performance or employee well-being'. EIP schemes are not seen in the context of other organisational policies and practice:

It is as though participation researchers are unaware of organisation design theory, especially systems theory... Any intervention that is not reinforced by multiple subsystems is unlikely to have major effects on performance or satisfaction because it is likely to be overwhelmed by organisational subsystems that do *not* reinforce participation (Ledford and Lawler, 1994: 634).

Riordan et al. (2005) also stress the importance of a supportive broader organisational context, without which isolated EIP practice will all too likely struggle and wither away.

Understanding, therefore, how to generate the 'mutual reinforcement' of different subsystems (i.e. the elements of EIP schemes discussed in this chapter) remains a key challenge. Researchers and practitioners alike need to view EIP in the context of the complementarities it enjoys, or lacks, with other HR policies. This, of course, is the configurational approach to HRM (Delery and Doty, 1996), and the argument for 'internal fit' (Wood, 1999).

## THE FATE OF THE SCHEME

One gap in the literature concerns the fate of EIP schemes. In their review of the adoption of new work practices, Lesure et al.'s (2004) note the importance of the 'integration' stage but they devote only a page to the scant research. They conclude, '... there is, in academic circles, a general belief that retention of a best practice past the ramp-up stage should not be taken for granted. This remains to be confirmed by research. Research also needs to address how managers can improve "retentive capacity"' (Lesure et al., 2004: 93).

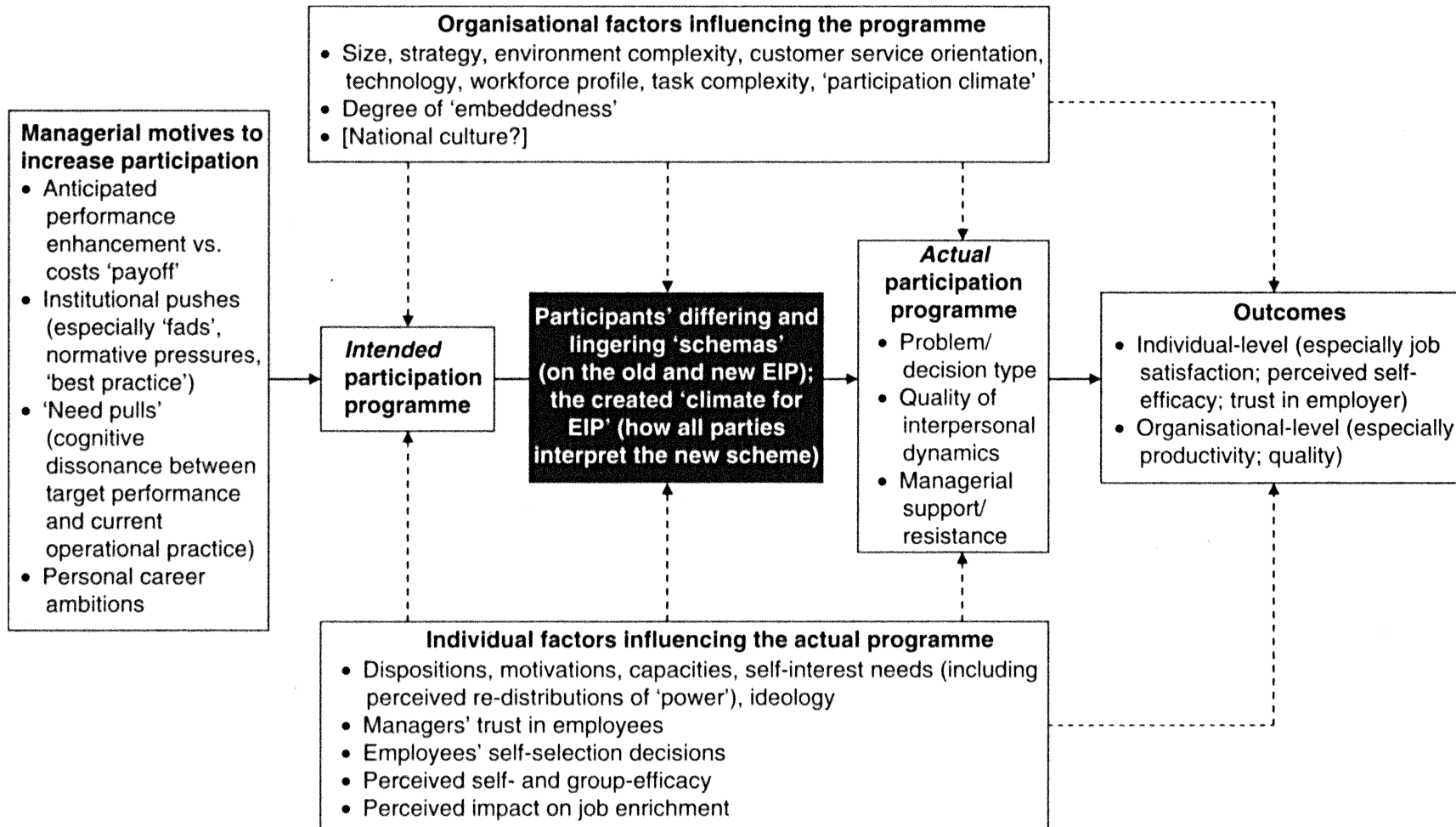


Figure 15.3 Glew and colleagues' framework of the participation process – with identified factors from previous research.

We see three possible ‘fates’ for EIP (Figure 15.1). The first is that the scheme is considered legitimate and valuable (howsoever defined) and becomes embedded in organisational routine; the second is that it fails to deliver to the satisfaction of one or more parties and is either ‘killed off’ or allowed to die from lack of care, and the third is that EIP lives on as a principle but its original form is replaced with a new scheme. There is some work which supports this latter notion of reinvention as schemes are worn out but revived under a new guise (Wilkinson et al., 2007).

Chi et al.’s (2007) longitudinal study on the adoption and termination of EIPs sheds some light on their fate. The failure rate of EIPs can be high and firms’ use of such programmes is not continuous, with a suggestion from their data is that it can take as long as 20 years for firms to find a steady-state distribution. Chi et al.’s analysis finds firms are less likely to terminate EIPs when they have other advanced HR practices and business strategies supportive of employee autonomy in the workplace. Equally, firms terminate EIPs as bundles, which further implies that the policies are complementary with each other.

## CONCLUSION

Figure 15.3 summarises in diagrammatic form some of the most influential variables that we have identified from the literature for each element of Glew and colleagues’ original framework.

The allure of EIP’s potential is generally made on three counts: its contribution to organisational effectiveness, its contribution to satisfying basic human needs and making good use of employees’ skills, and its possible impact on reducing ‘political inequalities’ inside organisations (see Strauss, 2006: 801). This attraction continues to draw generations of managers into planning, designing and implementing new forms of worker involvement and participation. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, the overwhelming impression from the literature is of a multitude

of factors that can determine success or failure. Moreover, each one of these variables is itself complex and the nature of the interactions among them even more so. George Strauss offered what seems to us a measured and elegant summary position on EIP thus:

My perspective on participation has always been somewhat ambivalent and sometimes cynical. I have always believed participation as a theory, in part because *when it works* (a key point), it provides a win-win solution to a central organisational problem: how to satisfy workers’ needs while simultaneously achieving organisational objectives. Today, my view is that workers’ participation can ‘work’ (by a variety of measures) but making it work is very difficult. My hopes for it are considerably diminished (Strauss, 2006: 778).

## NOTES

1 To illustrate, what Labianca et al. (2000) call an ‘empowerment’ programme in their study conforms to what Kessler and Purcell (1996) called a ‘joint working party’; what Tjosvold (1987: 739) calls ‘participation’ (‘a setting in which managers and employees can exchange information and ideas to solve problems’) does not comply with a convention in the British literature that ‘participation’ schemes must be indirect and representative in form. That said, Gollan et al.’s (2006: 499) definition of ‘participation’ in a special issue of *Industrial Relations* (encompassing ‘the range of mechanisms used to involve the workforce in decisions at all levels of the organisation – *whether direct or indirect* – conducted with employees or through their representatives’: our emphasis) ignores this distinction. Finally, Bartunek and Spreitzer (2006) examined 17 different meanings of ‘empowerment’.

2 There is also a somewhat paternalistic, even patronising whiff implied by the ‘gift’ of input being bestowed upon grateful employees.

3 This chapter will not look at financial forms of participation, such as share ownership and profit-related pay. This is reserved for the chapter on compensation.

4 Abrahamson’s work on management fashions (Abrahamson, 1996, 1997; Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999) suggests some insights into managerial impetus for EIP. First, EIP would be classed as a ‘normative’ rather than a ‘rational’ rhetoric for managing employees as it ‘can render employees more productive by shaping their thoughts and capitalising on their emotions’ (Abrahamson, 1997: 493) by satisfying their needs [including for a ‘voice’ in the workplace]. Abrahamson hypothesised, and

found in his studies counting academic and popular business press articles, that discourses advocating normative techniques have tended to emerge at the end of the upswing of a Kondratieff long wave, just before the downswing. Thus, managers' enthusiasm for EIP may be linked to a downturn in macro-economic trends and their disinterest may be shaped by economic upswings.

5 When Nissan set up its plant in the North East of England in the 1980s, Hague (1989) commented on the rapid 'Japanisation' of 'Geordie-land' (a colloquial term for people from Newcastle – even though the plant is technically down the road in Sunderland).

6 A respondent for Harlos' study (2001: 332) of voice systems told of managers analysing the handwriting of submissions to an anonymous suggestion box and checking shift attendance records to identify authors.

7 This last comment echoes, perhaps unwittingly, down the years to the celebrated conclusion in the Donovan enquiry into British industrial relations structures in the late 1960s: to regain control managers may have to share it with workers (Fox and Flanders, 1975).

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